



PLANNING BULLETIN

Spring 2005

Ochlockonee River publication shines light on overlooked river

"Oak. Lock. Knee: Three hard nouns. Three door knocks. This is how locals pronounce the name of the river that rises inauspiciously in the red clay soils of southwest Georgia and winds 206 miles to the Florida coast." Thus begins the *Ochlockonee River*, a publication by nationally respected environmental writer Richard Lenz, who highlights the river's rich history, critical natural resources, threats to the river and the need for conservation in the watershed. The author's rich narrative allows the reader to take a leisurely trip down the river, with glimpses into the natural and manmade communities that develop around this little-understood resource. Lenz pays particular attention to the landscape of the watershed, the natural beauty that characterizes the river, and the many threats to the river and the watershed. Magnificent photos, colorful maps, and descriptions of the many natural areas, parks and historic sites on the river contribute to make the *Ochlockonee River* a publication worthy of its name-sake. Funding for this publication was made possible through the generosity of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the collaboration of The Georgia Conservancy, Tall Timbers Research Station and The Conservation Fund. For additional information or a copy of the *Ochlockonee River* publication, please contact Neil Fleckenstein at 850-893-4153, ext. 335.



Good news for two Red Hills lakes

The Leon County Board of County Commissioners recently announced that the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) has published a proposed permit requiring that the City of Cairo establish strict limitations on the quality of wastewater discharged from the City's proposed wastewater treatment facility. Of greater importance, EPD is requiring that the City install a phosphorus treatment facility. This is critical because in documents filed in 2003 pursuant to a potential Clean Water Act lawsuit, Leon County claimed that nutrients from the existing plant were a significant source of pollution of Lake Iamonia and Lake Talquin. Leon County asked that EPD establish limits on the release of phosphorus from the new plant to receiving waters.

In a memorandum to the Leon County Commission, County Attorney Herb Thiele notes that the proposed permit reflects the results of negotiations between Leon County, Cairo and EPD. Thiele says that the newly required phosphorus treatment facility should remove a significant source of nutrient pollution in Lakes Iamonia and Talquin. To its credit, the City of Cairo has approved a \$12.5 million bond referendum to construct the new wastewater treatment plant and pay for the technology upgrade required to mitigate high concentrations of phosphorus.



Lake Iamonia, Leon County's largest lake



Tired Creek Lake project nearly ready for the "Corps"

Tired Creek Lake, a project with a history dating back more than 35 years, will be submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) for permitting consideration by mid-May, 2005. This was just one detail RHCP staff learned in a long-awaited meeting with Tired Creek consultant William Thomas Craig, his legal staff and consultants, and federal, state, and local regulatory personnel. The purpose of the meeting was to hear a presentation on the results of the environmental analysis required for all projects submitted to the Corps for permitting. RHCP staff and others learned that the project now includes the construction of a 1,200-acre recreational lake, 1,400 dwelling units, and possibly a golf course, conference center, and an 85-space RV park on the 2,900-acre site.

Mr. Craig discussed several aspects of the project including its potential impact on flows on Tired Creek and the Ochlockonee River. Mr. Craig stated that the data showed there would be very little impact on minimum flows downstream from the dam. Another issue of great interest to participants was the potential for water quality on the Ochlockonee River to be degraded by the construction of the dam and the eventual intense development of the Tired Creek property. Unfortunately, no data were presented on potential water quality impacts. Leon County Commissioner Dan Winchester noted that the project had grown significantly in size and intensity from previous meetings and the consultants were not providing the critical information that would allow Leon County staff as well as staff from other agencies to determine if there would be any downstream impacts to the Ochlockonee River, or Lakes Iamonia or Talquin.

For its part, Red Hills staff also has concerns about the absence of water quality data. This information would play an important role in allowing our staff to assess whether this project could adversely affect water quality in a river that users in Georgia and Florida depend upon for fishing, swimming, canoeing and boating. In addition, over the last four years, Tall Timbers staff have worked to conserve nearly 20,000 acres of land in the Ochlockonee River watershed with the generous assistance of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Protecting the water quality of the Ochlockonee River is critical to maintaining the conservation value of these lands. Once the Tired Creek project is submitted to the Corps, it will be reviewed internally and will also be available for a 30-day public review period during which individuals and organizations can provide comments and identify any concerns they may have regarding this project. Tall Timbers will participate in the public review of this project. For additional information about this issue, please contact Neil Fleckenstein at 850-893-4153, ext. 335.



One of three tributaries feeding Tired Creek

Grady County nuisance ordinance is put to the test

Owners and operators of five motocross tracks in Grady County have filed applications for variances from Grady County's nuisance ordinance. The variance applications were heard in a lively public hearing held on April 12, 2005 at the Grady County courthouse. The nuisance ordinance, which was adopted in November 2004, requires motocross tracks to meet restrictions on noise, lighting and hours of operation. The Grady County Commission adopted the ordinance to address the increasing number of complaints from homeowners that the tracks are seriously degrading the rural lifestyle that many have been accustomed to in Grady County.



One of Grady County's five motocross tracks

Over 200 people, including a number of young participants in the sport as well as many opposed to granting variances for the tracks, attended the hearing. Nearly all those opposed to granting the variances cited noise as their primary complaint. A common refrain was that the sound from motocross tracks carries well past the property boundary disturbing the quiet lifestyle that many say they used to enjoy before the tracks moved into Grady County. Track owners and motocross participants at the hearing stated that they want to be good neighbors and have made efforts to curtail noise and work with neighbors but the noise limits established by the County are too restrictive and cannot be achieved by motocross riders. Grady County Commission Chairman Bobby Burns, who facilitated the hearing, said that the Commission will render a decision on the variances in two to four weeks.